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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7753
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4668
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1921
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1542
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3636
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1445
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2269
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0537
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000161

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/IRF
INR FOR CHARLIE ZENZIE
NSC FOR EPHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PINS](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM -- GOI DECIDES NOT TO BAN SECT

REF: A. JAKARTA 63
[B. 07 JAKARTA 6464](#)
[C. 07 JAKARTA 3442](#)

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Indonesian government has decided not to ban a small Islamic sect. Instead, the GOI announced that it will monitor the group in order to make sure it is generally aligned with Sunni orthodoxy and not acting against "public order." While enthused that the group was not banned, members of the sect still fear harassment. It is positive that the GOI decided not to ban the group, an action that would only have harmed Indonesia's well-earned reputation as a moderate, pluralistic country. END SUMMARY.

NO BAN

[1](#)2. (SBU) The government has announced that it will not ban the Ahmadiyah sect. (Note: The Ahmadiyah are a small Muslim sect, claiming 500,000 members--a figure that could be inflated.) The GOI opted not to ban the group during a January 15 meeting of the Coordinating Body of Supervision of People's Beliefs (Pakem), an office under the Attorney General's authority. Wisnu Subroto, a Deputy Attorney General, told the media afterwards that "until now, there is no ban" on the sect. (Note: The Pakem meeting was triggered by an early January request to the AGO by the Indonesian Council of Ulema--known by the acronym MUI--that the government ban Ahmadiyah. See Refs.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) Instead, the meeting resulted in the issuance of a statement clarifying the substance of Ahmadiyah beliefs. This statement (see below) basically tried to stress the group's links to Sunni orthodoxy, the dominant strain of Islam in Indonesia. The statement was signed by Haji Abdul Basit Amir--head of the Indonesian Ahmadiyah Community--GOI officials and one civil society representative.

NOT OFF THE HOOK YET

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Ahmadiyah sect is not safe yet, however.

Rather than banning the sect, the GOI has given it three months to demonstrate implementation of the points set forth in the signed statement. The main points of the statement include an assertion that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is considered a teacher, not a prophet, and that Ahmadiyah mosques are open to any Muslim--they are not exclusive. These points counter criticisms by MUI and others that Ahmadiyahs are not real Muslims because they recognize Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the last prophet, rather than Muhammad (Ref A). It is not yet clear what the consequences would be if the sect was found not to have implemented any part of the twelve point statement.

15. (SBU) The Ministry of Religious Affairs is setting up a "monitoring team" to determine whether the sect is implementing the statement. Religious Affairs Minister Maftuh Basyuni defended the GOI's actions: "The government took a clear stance toward Ahmadiyah, namely to facilitate a dialogue which led the organization to issue its statement. So, let's wait and see." He further acknowledged that disbanding Ahmadiyah, or banning its teachings as demanded by some Muslims, would not lead to a resolution of the situation, but lead to questions about the state of religious pluralism in Indonesia. Other GOI officials have underscored that the government's chief interest in this case is to make sure that the sect is not acting against "public order," e.g., by undertaking activities that cause others in society "anger or distress."

DEEP CONCERNS LINGER

16. (C) While enthused that the group was not banned, members of the sect still fear violence and harassment. (Note: In recent months, members of the sect and its property have faced attack -- see Refs.) Members told Pol/C recently that they believe that the GOI has pulled back from banning the sect out of fear of energizing religious hard-liners by

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lending them a victory. That said, Ahmadiyahs' feel that they remain under great societal scrutiny and pressure to prove that their beliefs are not too divergent from Sunni Islam.

17. (C) In the meantime, human rights activists remain concerned that religious freedom in the country is under threat. Rafendi Djamin, from the Human Rights Working Group, a local NGO, told poloff that Pakem's actions contradict the freedoms guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution and other laws. In a January 16 press release, a coalition of activists called for Pakem to be dissolved. They described the office--which was established under the New Order with the ambit of policing religions and sects--as a "Suharto era holdover."

A POSITIVE SIGN

18. (C) The fact that the GOI did not ban the Ahmadiyah is a positive step for religious freedom in Indonesia. That said, the story is not yet over. Mainstream Islamic groups have influence in society and politics, and some do not like the sect. As has happened with other sects, our guess is that extremists will continue to place pressure on the Ahmadiyahs while continuing to urge the GOI to ban the group. Indonesia has a very good record as a tolerant country and we will continue to urge it to support religious freedom per its own Constitution and laws.

HUME